

# **The Moral Libertarian Horizon, Volume 1**

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## The Moral Libertarian: A Moral Case for Liberty and Liberalism

In recent years, it has become fashionable to look down upon liberalism. It started on the right a few decades ago.

American conservatives quite successfully painted American liberals as people who are elitist, out of touch, and spend tax dollars 'liberally' just because they want to. Now this disease has spread to the left. While American conservatives still use the l-word to describe everyone to their left, resulting in ridiculous phrases like 'Bernie Sanders is very liberal' (when he won't even support free trade), a new generation of leftists have identified themselves as socialists and pit their identity against those people they call liberal, as in Bernie is a socialist, Hillary is a liberal. While the attacks on liberalism come from different angles, they share some common themes: liberals are out of touch elitists, supporters of the privileged establishment, enemy of the common good, technocrats who think they know what's best for everyone, and so on. A very sad description indeed, especially for the ideology of Locke, Mill and Burke, the ideology of both Keynes and Hayek, the ideology of such great leaders as Prime Minister Lloyd George and President Franklin Roosevelt, and the ideology of most early feminists.

### Liberalism's Fall From Grace

So how did liberalism fall so far from grace? I believe the answer lies in idealism, or rather, the lack thereof. As liberalism came from the margins into the mainstream of political thought, it took on the reins of government more and more frequently. By the mid 20th century, liberalism became identified with governments, who was inevitably made up mostly by elite and establishment figures, and whose day-to-day job was mostly concerned with making practical decisions, often on the advice of technocratic 'experts'. In other words, what was once conservatism's weakness became liberalism's weakness. We can actually see that at the same time, in the former Soviet block, these establishment characteristics became lumped in with socialism. We can also see that, as western conservatives started losing their grip on the establishment, they started finding their idealistic voice again, and began to attack liberals as the new 'establishment'. Looking at the bigger picture, we can see that liberalism caught the disease of the establishment in the mid 20th century, and never quite recovered. Being in the establishment makes a movement lose sight of its ideals, and this insight may still fail to recover even if the establishment position is lost.

I think it is safe to say that liberalism is no longer the establishment, right now, to put it very mildly. As of this writing (2018), liberalism only accounts for a minority of world leaders. US president Donald Trump is surely not liberal. In fact, both conservatism and socialism are arguably stronger than liberalism at this point in history. Why? Because they have an ideal, they have a narrative. Right now,

libertarianism is the only branch of the liberal tree to have anything close to a strong narrative built on strong principles. And even much of libertarianism isn't based on a moral worldview like conservatism or socialism. The moral consequences of consistently applying the Non-Aggression Principle (NAP) remains a controversial thing for many people, and libertarians have often argued their case on economic efficiency and lower taxes to avoid this controversy. I'm not making this up: some libertarians have argued that their ideology will allow people to truly follow their moral compass without collective coercion from society, while others have argued that with all property being private property, socially deviant behaviour will be effectively suppressed by the property owners acting out of their self interest. Which simply looks like, the consequences of a libertarian government will be what I want it to be. As for the form of liberalism that comes with a welfare state, it looks even worse. If welfare state liberalism is all about equality and wealth redistribution, wouldn't it be even more principled to go straight for socialism and oppose all free market capitalism outright? (Which is, not coincidentally, what many young people are doing.) For many people, liberalism simply doesn't look like a morality sound and principled way of looking at politics.

## Liberalism as a Moral Worldview: The Principle of Equal Moral Agency

But is liberalism morally sound? To answer this question, we need to look at what liberalism is. Liberalism is the ideology that is primarily concerned with liberty, above all else. Socialism is more concerned with economic equality than liberty, conservatism is more concerned with maintaining tradition than liberty, and nationalism is more concerned with the future of the nation than individual liberty. Putting liberty first is the defining feature of liberalism, therefore. However, this cannot be liberalism's only feature, for liberty is also found in various forms in other ideologies. For example, in traditional feudal societies with absolute monarchies, the King had almost unlimited liberty. The lords also had an amount of liberty much greater than any citizen in a modern liberal democracy: for example, they had the 'liberty' to own and trade slaves. The unique thing about liberalism is that it aims to distribute as equally as possible the liberty of each person in society. Therefore, while nobody can have the liberties of kings and nobles past, everyone can have their fair share of liberty. While liberals disagree on how liberty can be distributed most equally, with some arguing for NAP-based libertarianism and others arguing for a strong welfare state, this often unspoken shared principle is what we have in common.

How does liberalism's dedication to distributing liberty equally make it a moral ideology? To answer this question, we need to first look at what liberty is. Liberty is the power an individual has over their own actions, their ability to put their ideas into action. Therefore, looking at it from a moral perspective, liberty is moral agency, i.e. the ability to act in

accordance with one's moral compass. An equitable distribution of liberty therefore ensures an equitable distribution of moral agency. In this way, liberalism ensures that every individual in society has an equal share of moral agency. At this point, we need to turn to the fact that liberty (and hence moral agency) are also finite resources: if some have more, others must have less. If lords can command slaves (therefore having more liberty), slaves will not be able to act according to their own moral compass, and thus have no moral agency. Therefore, in an equal distribution of liberty (and hence moral agency), everyone can have full moral agency over their own beliefs and actions, but nobody can have moral agency over another. This, I would argue, makes liberalism the ONLY morally valid ideology. Since all human beings are morally flawed to some extent, allowing some humans to have moral agency over others is morally impermissible. Allowing a lord to command a slave as he pleases means that the slave must commit an immoral act even if the act is both objectively immoral (as in absolute truth) and known to be immoral by the slave, as long as the act is not known to be immoral by the lord (or alternatively he is a depraved lord and does not care). This has several consequences. On an individual level, the slave would be morally responsible (at least in his conscience, and also by the laws of religion for those of us who are religious) for committing a moral wrong, knowing that it is wrong, but not being able to resist anyway. On a societal level, it also means that those holding power can commit severe atrocities, without the moral consciences of other people acting as a brake. Which was actually how tragedies like the holocaust happened. One may be tempted to argue that, as long as we

prevent having bad governments by being vigilant voters and by putting in place national and international regulations, nothing as bad will happen again. But this is naive, because the ability to judge if governments are good is limited by the fact that politicians often lie their way into power and manipulate the political landscape once in office. It is also still true that no human being can perfectly know the absolute truth of what is morally right or wrong, and therefore, if we simply let those in power decide for everyone, there will still be plenty of injustices, even if nowhere as great as the holocaust. The principle of Equal Moral Agency is the only thing that will prevent such injustices.

## Liberalism's Individualism is Required by its Morality

The other thing about liberalism is that it is an individualistic ideology, i.e. it looks at individuals rather than groups of people or society as a whole. Socialism cares about the equality of social classes, and nationalism cares about the nation state as a whole, with both ideologies refusing to look at people on an individual level. In contrast, liberalism, insists that the equal distribution of liberty is to be implemented on an individual-by-individual basis. It is not good enough if, say, overall the people of Australia have the same amount of liberty as the people of Britain, if some people in both countries don't get their fair share of liberty. It is also not good enough if, say, overall working class women have the same amount of liberty as middle class men, if some people in both socio-economic groups don't get their fair share of

liberty. The liberal aversion to some forms of affirmative action comes from this principle. For example, no liberal should support the 'progressive stack' speaking system used at some Occupy rallies. Furthermore, unlike in many other ideologies, the same rules apply to governments, because they are also ultimately made up of individuals. Therefore, the government cannot have more liberty to make moral decisions than individual citizens, even if the government is democratically elected, and even if they claim to make the decisions on behalf of oppressed minorities. For example, the government cannot coerce anyone to accept a definition of marriage they don't agree with, even if it had a majority mandate to do so, and this applies for all possible definitions of marriage. This is why liberals equally uphold marriage equality (like the left) and religious freedom about marriage (like the right). Another example is that liberals should support the right of parents to withdraw their children from absolutely any class they don't agree with, in public schools. Many of the aforementioned political positions have caused rifts between liberals and leftists in recent years. But we liberals must stand our ground firmly, if we are to be true to our moral worldview.

While both liberals and leftists are historically considered together under the progressive umbrella, liberalism's insistence on individual rights at every turn has always sat uncomfortably with the Left's wish for collective action on almost everything. The Left believes that collective, and often coercive, action can bring about progress much more efficiently. But this collective, coercive action is clearly in

violation of the principle of Equal Moral Agency: those setting the agenda for the collective movement decide the course of action, and others have to follow for fear of ostracization or worse. In recent years, the Left's disregard for individuals' rights to have a fair share of moral agency has worryingly accelerated, as free speech has been replaced by safe speech (i.e. speech that is deemed politically correct by movement leaders), and measures like the so-called progressive stack, which clearly violate the equal right of every individual's voice to be considered, are popularized. Of course, while the Left claims to want more female, ethnic and LGBT voices to be heard, the moment one of these voices promotes an idea the leaders find 'regressive', it is shut down. As a result of this new straitjacket on leftist thinking, conformity within leftist ranks has accelerated, with those who are pro-life or have certain foreign policy views increasingly find themselves spat on by the movements they once considered their political homes. Meanwhile, the lack of a free speech culture means that feminist and LGBT movements are whitewashed to look like a homogenous whole without much dissent on key issues. The Left is clearly embarking on a misguided path.

Meanwhile, liberalism's emphasis on individual liberty and moral conscience provides a much better way forward for social justice. Liberalism encourages everyone to make their case in the free market of ideas. The morality or lack thereof of each idea can be debated freely, and with individuals having the moral agency to put their ideas into practice, time will also tell what fruit their ideas will bear. In this way, the

free market effectively decides the best, most moral and most fruitful, ideas that will survive into the future. John Stuart Mill called this the cauldron of ideas, with new ideas being added into the cauldron constantly and good ones living on, but I prefer the free market metaphor because it is, to some extent, a competitive process. A brand new idea, like a brand new product in the marketplace, is usually nowhere near perfect. The process of having to compete with competitors leads to modification and innovation, and even in some cases imitation, to make for a more competitive product. In the same way, ideas can be refined, and the morality of individuals and hence the society they live in can improve with time, just like how the quality of consumer goods improve with time. Also, in this free market of ideas, there is no need to subjectively judge whether ideas are progressive or regressive. If an idea is truly regressive, i.e. worse than what is already on offer, people will not 'buy it', much like how nobody can hope to make a profit off a business selling twenty-year-old computers. If an idea is truly regressive, it will not survive the free market of ideas. On the other hand, if an idea can thrive in the free market of ideas, then it cannot be regressive in an objective sense.

## The Moral Libertarian Creed

Of course, what I have outlined above is only one reason to support liberalism. Both historically and in the present, there have been plenty of other reasons for liberal politics. Mill's liberalism, for example, was strongly associated with his

utilitarianism, while my liberalism clearly has nothing to do with utilitarianism. Therefore, we need a specific term to describe the supporters of liberal politics who approach it from a moralistic angle, or more specifically, those who are committed to the principle of Equal Moral Agency as their creed. I propose that we identify as Moral Libertarians. Like civil libertarians being concerned primarily with civil liberties, we are primarily concerned with moral liberty. And just like civil libertarianism, moral libertarianism does not have a fixed economic program. Civil libertarians can be anything from monarchists to socialists, depending on their other beliefs. Likewise, moral libertarians can take a variety of economic positions, depending on their views of what moral liberty should entail and how it can be equitably distributed, informed by their own conscience. Thus moral libertarianism forms a new branch of the liberal tree, overlapping somewhat with libertarianism, classical liberalism, civil libertarianism and welfare liberalism in different ways.

## Moral Libertarian Perspective: Equality of Moral Agency

The principle of equality of moral agency is central to moral libertarianism, because the need to allow every single individual their equal share of moral agency underpins the moral case for liberty and liberalism. As I have previously illustrated, liberals are not the only people who allow some kind of liberty, but we are the only ones who insist that liberty be given equally to every individual, not excluding those in government. Traditional feudalism allowed kings and lords almost boundless liberty simply by inheritance, but that meant slaves and serfs did not have any moral agency over their own actions, i.e. they could not act upon their moral consciences in their lives, but rather had to obey the consciences of their lords. We liberals, and moral libertarians in particular, cannot support offering anyone the kind of liberty kings and lords once had, because that would include having moral agency over other people, which means taking away other people's fair share of moral agency. Instead, we strive for every adult to have an equal amount of moral agency, which must therefore mean that everyone has full moral agency over themselves, and only themselves. But why is this important? And what does the application of this principle look like in practice?

### What Equality of Moral Agency Implies

I believe that the principle of equality of moral agency is the most important principle in political morality, because it is the only way of distributing liberty (which is one and the same as moral agency, liberty being from a political rights perspective and moral agency from a moralistic perspective) that is consistent with the fact that every human being has equal moral standing from birth, and the fact that all human beings are flawed in some ways (i.e. not perfect and not capable of knowing the absolute truth in every sense). Let's start with the equal moral standing part. In fact, the founding fathers of the United States were some of the first people to recognise this: in their words, everyone was created equal, and therefore everyone has certain inalienable rights.

Inalienable is the keyword here: these rights cannot be rightfully taken away by any action of any external authority, whether the authority comes from hereditary privilege or from collective mandate. Any action that compromises these inalienable rights are morally illegitimate. To believe that every human being is born equal morally requires that liberty (and hence moral agency) is distributed equally; in other words, a failure to distribute liberty equally is morally inexcusable, unless you happen to believe that people are not born equal. Now, let's look at the fact that all human beings are flawed. Because all human beings are flawed, nobody can certainly make the right decisions every single time. To allow one human being to make moral decisions for another against their will therefore potentially means forcing someone to commit a moral wrong even while knowing it is wrong. Furthermore, allowing those in power to make moral decisions for everyone else means that, when the leader of a country doesn't get it right, the whole country commits a

moral wrong. The worst example of this in all human history would be the Holocaust.

## Mussolini, the Father of Fascism: He Who Does Not Believe in Equality of Humans

Now, let's look at what happens when the principle of equality of moral agency is not respected. Mussolini, the father of fascism, was a classic example of a man who did not believe in the equality of moral agency. According to Mussolini, all the individual wills of the Italian people had to be moulded into one, and in practice that meant he had all the moral agency in the whole of Italy and his people had none. This was consistent with his belief that he was some kind of superman who could do no wrong, as captured by the slogan 'Mussolini is always right'. As Mussolini thought that he was not flawed and always made the right decisions, he believed he deserved moral agency over his people because he would always make the right decisions while his people may not. But of course, this was pure hubris on his part, as in reality he was one of the most immoral human beings who ever lived, and the ideology he invented brought endless misery to countless numbers of people. To disrespect the principle of equality of moral agency, to think that one can make a better decision and hence should have moral agency over other people, is to have at least some of Mussolini's hubris. While most people who believe in forcing their morality down other people's throats are nowhere as evil as Mussolini, their hubris is just as morally unsound.

## Others who Disrespect the Equality of Moral Agency: Too close to Mussolini for comfort

The most classic case of Mussolini-style moral hubris is the kind of people who think they are carrying out God's Will, and hence have the authority to do anything in their 'mission'. Since they believe their ideas and actions necessarily reflect God's Will and hence the absolute truth, they believe there is no need to allow their human beings equal moral agency. This idea is most often associated with fundamentalist religious militants, who have caused tragedy after tragedy, who have committed utmost acts of evil while believing that they were carrying out God's Will. However, similar themes can be found in some sections of the religious right in the mainstream politics in many countries, who often self-righteously attempt to frustrate democratic mandates for liberal reforms because they think they are acting in God's Will. Thinking that one's beliefs in any area is certainly in line with God's Will is the same as thinking that one's beliefs, in that area at least, is 'always right'. This pattern of thinking leads straight to Mussolini-style hubris. On the other hand, a moral libertarian is allowed to have conservative viewpoints (otherwise it would defeat the point of moral libertarianism, right?), but they would need to make their case fairly and respectfully through the free market of ideas.

But it would be a folly to think that only those on the right are capable of such moral hubris. After all, Mussolini was left-wing when he was a young man. The left may not talk much in terms of God's Will, but they do talk a lot in terms of justice. Justice means the right thing to do, and is simply the secular equivalent of God's Will. Like how some of the political religious right think that their version of morality is always God's Will, an increasing number of leftists believe that their version of justice is always actual justice. When one starts to think this way, one essentially allows themselves the right to impose one's own version of justice on others, including those who do not believe in the same version of justice. For example, when authoritarian leftists believe that free speech leads to injustice, they insist that everyone practice safe speech (as they define it), and ideas that don't accord with their version of justice are met with actions of no-platforming, sometimes violent. Some moral libertarians may well share similar beliefs to these leftists in various areas, but out of respect of the equality of moral agency, would instead do their best to make their case in the free market of ideas, hoping to persuade other people to join their cause of action, while seriously dealing with the arguments thrown up by opponents. As a result of their morally unsound approach, the authoritarian leftists end up trying to impose upon everyone programs of 'justice' that even those who would supposedly benefit from don't want, like the kind of radical feminism that most women actually reject, or the kind of intersectional feminism that is actually GLIF (gatekeeper limited intersectional feminism, i.e. where intersectional oppressions only count if you have the correct political beliefs too). On the other hand, moral libertarians

can continue to refine their ideas of justice through competition in the free market of ideas, gradually modifying what they offer as a result of feedback from people's lived realities, resulting in ideas that benefit as many people as possible.

## Equality of Moral Agency: The Basics

So for those of us who decide that we don't want any part of Mussolini-style moral hubris, that we wish to respect and honour the equality of moral agency in every way, where do we start? First of all, we need to see our ideological opponents as having equal moral agency too. As long as they are not shoving their beliefs down other people's throats, to live and let live is our only option. No-platforming and safe speech are too fascistic to even be considered. Secondly, we need to learn to love and respect the free market of ideas. While it is a good thing to be strongly passionate about justice, we need to make our case in the free market of ideas, and treat our ideological opponents as equals in the process. We need to be open to feedback, especially in relation to people's actual lived experiences. This will make our ideological 'products' more responsive to the actual needs of individuals and families living in the real world, and make them more 'competitive' in the marketplace of ideas. Rather than seeing everything in us-vs-them (or 'class struggle') terms, we need to see the development of ideas of morality and justice as a continual process of refinement, which is facilitated by this free market of ideas, just like how the free

market of consumer goods leads to the improvement of such goods over the years. Finally, we need to recognise that it is not up to any of us to determine subjectively whether each idea is progressive or 'regressive'. If an idea can thrive in the free market, it is by objective definition bringing new value to previously unserved populations and serving previously unmet needs, and is therefore progressive. If an idea is objectively regressive, i.e. it is worse than what is currently on offer in all respects and does not bring new value to anyone, it will not survive in the free market of ideas.

## Should a Moral Libertarian Always Support Smaller Government?

Political libertarians, by definition, always support reducing the size of government. The political libertarian application of the non-aggression principle (NAP) requires that taxation be kept to a minimum, and therefore the size of government be kept to a minimum. But just like how civil libertarians can sometimes be, but not always are, political libertarians, moral libertarians also are not always politically libertarian. This is because civil libertarians and moral libertarians both focus on one aspect of liberty that is not predominantly economic, while political libertarians emphasize mostly economic liberties and property rights. Therefore, while political libertarians always support smaller government, it is not a foregone conclusion that the same applies to all moral libertarians. But, in reality, should moral libertarians support smaller government?

### Moral Libertarians are not always Political Libertarians, because the Economy is a Complex Thing

Since moral libertarianism is necessarily based on the principle of the equality of moral agency, whether a moral libertarian should strive for smaller government also depends on whether smaller government is more consistent with the

equal distribution of moral agency or not. For some moral libertarians, the answer is simple. Since they believe that the NAP is the ultimate expression of equal moral agency (since nobody can initiate aggression against another), the full application of the NAP is, in their opinion, the closest we can get to having equality of moral agency. Therefore, supporting immediatist libertarian politics, i.e. cutting government by as much as possible, and right now, is a logical conclusion.

Other moral libertarians also see great compatibility between the NAP and equality of moral agency, but recognise that the immediate application of libertarian politics could lead to outcomes where some people's basic liberties (and hence moral agency) could be in a worse situation than is the case right now. Hence they advocate a gradualist libertarian politics. Still others believe that, since the power to coerce people does not solely reside in the government in modern society, the government should be maintained at an adequate size to counter other potentially coercive forces, like gross economic inequality. Again, within this camp, opinions about the adequate size of government can differ. Hence, there is no one single answer as to if moral libertarians should support smaller government.

And that's OK. Because moral libertarianism is ultimately about respecting the equality of individual moral consciences, people are allowed to differ in their consciences, and make their case in the free market of ideas. Since each political state can only have one government, the size of government is an unavoidably collective matter. In my opinion, where matters are truly unavoidably collective (i.e.

not just conventionally collective like the definition of marriage), every concerned individual owns a part of the matter, and where equal moral agency is respected, a democratic method of decision making (as close to one person, one vote as possible) should decide the outcome. Therefore, in my opinion, moral libertarians should make their case about the appropriate size of government to promote equal moral agency, and should also participate in the democratic process as guided by their individual consciences. It really doesn't matter that moral libertarians will therefore not be voting the same way as each other because, unlike the left, we do not believe in collectiveness in action, except where people have genuinely voluntarily agreed to.

## More on the Liberal Debate about the Size of Government

Modern American commentators like to divide liberals into 'classical liberals', who supposedly believe in the absolute right to private property like modern libertarians, and 'modern liberals' or 'social liberals', who spend tax dollars liberally to solve society's problems. In fact, that's not even close to the truth. Even John Locke, often considered the father of classical liberalism, stressed that while society should respect private property rights there should be enough and as good left over for everyone else, a sentiment clearly incompatible with sections of modern libertarianism who believe that all property should be private. Also, John

Stuart Mill and Prime Minister Lloyd George supported some wealth redistribution, with the latter raising taxes while in office. Liberalism has always strived to balance property rights with other factors that affect the liberty of individuals.

My personal inclination is towards having a government that is large enough to support a strong social safety net, but as limited as possible beyond that. While a government too big will be tempted to use its powers to coerce individuals (thus violating the principle of equal moral agency), a government too small may mean third parties effectively have the power to coerce individuals, for example via economic means. There needs to be a balance somewhere in the middle. In my opinion, a government that provides a moderate welfare state particularly in healthcare, education and looking after the unemployed, but otherwise respecting the free market and international free trade, as well as private ownership of industries, provides the best balance. I am also a libertarian gradualist, in that I believe the size of government should be reduced when it will no longer adversely affect anyone's liberty as a result, and we should strive to make this situation a possibility in the longer term.

## What About Social Issues?

While moral libertarians do not always have to support smaller government in an economic sense, we do need to stay true to the principle of equality of moral agency when it

comes to cultural and moral matters. In my opinion, governments should be as neutral as possible in cultural and moral controversies. Here, the role of government is to maintain the free market of ideas, by maintaining the rule of law and the safety of individuals, so people can speak up without fear. The government taking sides is generally incompatible with respecting the equality of moral agency, because that would mean individuals making decisions in the government (e.g. presidents, prime ministers, members of parliament or congress) having greater moral agency than private individuals. Even if the government takes sides based on majority mandate, it would still mean that individuals with the majority view have greater moral agency than individuals with the minority view. Unlike the economy and national security, most cultural and moral issues are not unavoidably collective, and should be de-collectivized as much as possible so that individuals can truly have equal moral agency over these issues. It is due to this reason that I support marriage privatization, for example. In this sense, I do believe that moral libertarians should mostly, if not always, support smaller government.

## Is Moral Libertarianism Compatible with Conservatism? (What does it say about abortion?)

I have written a few other pieces examining if moral libertarianism is compatible with various ideologies (e.g. thin libertarianism, thick libertarianism, welfare liberalism, socialism). However, conservatism is yet another important ideology with lots of followers, and probably the most popular ideology worldwide at the moment. Hence, we need to answer the questions: is moral libertarianism compatible with conservatism? Can conservatives work with moral libertarians? Can one be a conservative and a moral libertarian at the same time?

Conservatism is a political ideology that has both economic and social aspects. Since moral libertarianism is actually compatible with any economic ideology as long as it is justified on liberty, and conservatives justify that small government economic philosophy on liberty, there is nothing incompatible here. Therefore, the rest of this article will focus on the social issues.

Moral libertarianism insists on equally distributing liberty, and hence moral agency, among every individual in society. Therefore, as moral libertarians, we insist that every individual be able to live according to their moral compass, as

long as they do not infringe upon others' rights to do so. As promoting conservative ideas and living according to conservative values does not infringe upon any other person's moral agency, moral libertarians cannot be opposed to this kind of conservatism. In fact, moral libertarians have a responsibility to defend the right of conservatives to live according to their moral compass. While moral libertarianism does not say anything about abortion, for example, it says that everyone must be able to live according to their values on this issue. Therefore, moral libertarians absolutely support and defend the right of conservatives to voice their opposition to abortion under any circumstances, without social penalty. Furthermore, moral libertarians absolutely support and defend the rights of pro-life health professionals not to be involved in abortions.

On the other hand, moral libertarianism's principle of equal moral agency also means that no person can make cultural or moral decisions for another person. Therefore, we oppose government enforcement, and even encouragement or discouragement, of any worldview or lifestyle, and support ending such paternalistic actions where they have traditionally occurred. This means we cannot accept some aspects of traditional conservatism. However, traditional conservatism's reliance on government intervention to uphold tradition actually assumes one thing: that they have the ability to do so. In a democracy, that would mean the conservative position has majority support. Evidently, this is not always the case, especially in the West in recent decades. Throughout history, when conservatives had majority

support, they often used government power to enforce their morals. But this actually creates a precedent, allowing other groups to use government power similarly in the future. Hence, part of the modern conservative experience is to fear leftist authorities refusing to leave conservatives alone to live their conservative lives. A switch to the principles of moral libertarianism will effectively prevent this from happening.

Conservatism is also not a monolithic thing. People who wish to uphold tradition may choose to 'adapt' differently, in the face of changed circumstances. For example, while most conservatives oppose same-sex marriage at the moment, former UK Prime Minister David Cameron famously said that his support for same-sex marriage was due to his conservative values. If you happen to believe that marriage equality is key to preserving the relevance of marriage as an institution for the future of humanity (like I do), then you would naturally see the majority conservative position as actually aiding anti-marriage radicals on the far-left. Members of conservative parties around the world who hold this view (but are not in leadership positions like Cameron was) are often pressured to stay silent. In contrast, moral libertarians believe that everyone should be equally able to make their case in the free market of ideas, allowing all views to be heard.

In conclusion, moral libertarianism provides plenty of space for conservatives to both promote their values and live according to their moral compass. While we have no choice

but to oppose old-school conservative governments' sometimes paternalistic policies, the other side of the same coin means that we will always defend conservatives' right to their own moral agency against those leftists who believe that people should be pressured into going with their program. This is actually quite a good deal, especially given that modern conservatives can no longer be certain that they always have majority support.

## Moral Libertarian Perspective: All Social Engineering is Morally Unsound

Almost everyone say that hate social engineering. Many people hate social engineering with a passion, and for good reason. Most people's gut reaction to social engineering is that it is unfair and tricky, somewhat like rigging an election. For moral libertarians, who believe in the equality of liberty (and hence moral agency), social engineering is unconditionally unacceptable, because it means that those doing the engineering are making important decisions, often moral decisions, for the subjects of the engineering.

Wherever there is social engineering, there is no respect for the principle of equal moral agency, and hence no respect for the equality between humans. From a moral libertarian perspective, social engineering is simply immoral.

Another thing about social engineering is that it is much easier to oppose social engineering designed to achieve outcomes you don't like. For example, conservatives are good at spotting the slightest leftist slant in public education curricula. But the same people would often justify pro-conservative social engineering, such as government policy that favours heterosexual relationships over homosexual relationships, as either upholding tradition or upholding the will of the 'silent majority'. This is actually a double standard, because social engineering is still social engineering, even if it has been carried out for hundreds of years, and even if it is

supported by the majority. From a moral libertarian perspective, the principle of equal moral agency is still violated, because the individuals making decisions in government are still making moral decisions that all other individuals in society must accept, even if against their own will. The government is still the moral master, and the people are still the moral slaves. In fact, if those supporting conservative viewpoints truly believe that they have the unwavering support of the majority, they really do not need the government to uphold anything. If they allow the government to step aside from governing the moral sphere, private individuals will regain their fair and equal share of moral conscience, and conservative individuals (which conservative politicians believe are the majority) will be able to live out their conservative beliefs by personal example, much more effectively than when government interference exists.

The left is similarly blind when social engineering favours their worldview. While the left is generally unsympathetic to social engineering for the sake of preserving the status quo, they are much more sympathetic to social engineering that will supposedly promote equality of outcome. In many leftist circles, free speech is becoming increasingly rare, and policed speech is increasingly becoming the norm. So-called safe speech is often justified on the need to protect the feelings of minorities, but in reality it is a form of censorship, that effectively disallows certain ideas from entering the free market of ideas (or John Stuart Mill's cauldron of ideas if you prefer that analogy). Even if you start with, for example, the

seemingly clear-cut rules of only prohibiting racist and homophobic speech, it effectively sets a precedent that can potentially disallow political speech promoting pro-life ideas (because it hurts the feelings of women who had abortions) or cultural expressions that are deemed to be cultural appropriation (because it hurts the feelings of people who don't wish to see cultural appropriation). And once it becomes acceptable to ban political speech and cultural expressions, there really is no limit to what else can be banned. A Stalinist dictatorship is the only logical conclusion.

Another worrying recent development is the prioritization of people's right to speak, based on their personal characteristics. This was first seen in the 'progressive stack' speaking system that was used in some Occupy rallies, where women and minorities were afforded priority in their right to speak. This system clearly sees people as members of groups rather than individuals, in a way not unsimilar to how old-school socialism saw people as solely members of their economic class, or how fascism saw people as solely members of their nation and their race. In the name of achieving some sort of group-based equality, the principle of equal moral agency between individuals is sacrificed. Furthermore, as the progressive stack is a social construct invented and maintained by leaders of leftist movements, it is a system in which they decide the rules, it is therefore by definition a system in which the leaders have much more moral agency than anyone else. From my personal experience, it is not uncommon for those who have the right to decide who is to speak to use their power to favour those

who will say what they want to hear. In recent years, I have heard from an increasing number of women and LGBT people complaining that they have been excluded from systems and institutions that are supposed to be inclusive, because those running the system don't like to hear what they have to say. (Those running the system often like to counter that people who promote 'regressive' ideas are to be excluded. However, this definition of 'regressive' is a subjective one, and often bears no relationship to the more objective definition of regressive I use, i.e. does not bring any new value to anyone beyond what has already been offered. In fact, I often suggest that, if an idea really meets the aforementioned objective definition of regressive, it will be rejected in the free market of ideas, so we don't need to do anything about it.)

p.s. A particularly worrying feature of leftist social engineering is that it is often inspired by theories arising from sources like philosophy, sociology or feminism. While I believe it is important for people to critically reflect on the state of our society, and many such theories have given us useful language and frameworks to discuss important issues, the theories themselves are almost always far from flawless, to put it mildly. In fact, I make this observation about history: although progressives have been the winners throughout history (because, by definition, only new ideas can change the course of history, restating old ones cannot), progressives of any era only get a minority of things right, and more progressive ideas eventually get rejected than accepted. The French revolution's Liberty, Equality, Fraternity lived on, but

their revolutionary calendar did not. Similarly, 19th century socialists played a very important role in highlighting the injustices of early capitalism towards the working class, but their demands to nationalize industries have been largely rejected. Karl Marx's prediction of the collapse of capitalism has not come true either. This is not to say that the investigation of society and the production of progressive ideas is not worthy. It just highlights the need for such ideas to be tested and refined in the free market of ideas.

## Moral Libertarian Perspective: Genuinely Free Markets are a Moral Imperative

Ever since the Global Financial Crisis, it has been fashionable to blame the free market for everything. This, in turn, has caused a substantial number of people to believe that, if the free market can be abolished or at least severely constrained, it would be to the great benefit of humanity. In this political climate, those who espouse anti free market ideas certainly don't lack ears willing to listen. But is the idea of a free market really that bad? Or is abandoning the free market really a good idea?

First, let's start with the moral libertarian perspective. The moral libertarian answer on this issue is clear: moral agency (and hence liberty) must be distributed as equally as possible. Since the only alternative to having a free market is having a government controlled market (as in a command economy), the only way to abandon the free market is to allow the government to have decision making powers far beyond that of private citizens. Therefore, to oppose free markets in practice always means violating the principle of equal moral agency. It logically follows that moral libertarians must support free markets. Moral libertarians can differ on how a genuinely free market can be maintained, for example regarding what role the government may play in stabilising economic conditions and providing equal opportunity for all, or if any and what kind of anti-trust and competition

regulations there should be. But there is no way a moral libertarian can oppose the free market and still stay true to the principle of equal moral agency.

But let's not talk in terms of abstract principles, because facts are more persuasive for most people. There has never been a liberal democracy that has also not had some form of free market economy. While there are countries with free markets but not liberal democracy, there has never been a country with liberal democracy but not free markets. In other words, although it isn't necessarily true that the freer the market, the freer the people, where the markets aren't free, the people certainly aren't free. In fact, the early history of the USSR illustrates why this is the case. Lenin wanted to abolish private property and free market capitalism, but was not able to do so completely. The much more hard-line Stalin put in place a program of compulsory collectivization, which of course led to massive resistance, especially from peasants whose land were being confiscated. Stalin, of course, crushed all resistance ruthlessly. The lesson is that, since people are not going to voluntarily give up their economic interests, anyone hoping to control the economy would need to be as much of a ruthless dictator as Stalin. Of course, Stalin had to control more than just the economy. As he became deeply unpopular, he had to also disallow political dissent to protect his rule, so that his program of collectivization could continue. This demonstrates why you cannot abolish the free market economy without also abolishing political, and hence social and cultural, freedoms.

The free market of economic goods and services is also ultimately inseparable from the free market of ideas. In command economies, goods can only be produced and sold with the government's permission. This means the choice of goods and services available is strictly limited by the government. Whatever goods the government doesn't like, it can effectively ban. At this point, we need to keep in mind that some goods are cultural or political, for example books and movies. In fact, historically, those who controlled the printing press controlled knowledge and opinion. Similarly, a command economy unavoidably gives government the power to control knowledge and opinion in society.

The recent backlash against the free market economy has to do with its perceived unfairness. I actually believe that this point is worth discussing. Traditionally, those who believe in a market with minimal intervention have claimed to be the truest and purest champions of the free market. Hayek and his followers famously claim that they do not care if people start in a position of equal opportunity, and that social justice is meaningless. But the moral libertarian perspective actually provides an alternative view of what a free market should look like. Moral libertarians primarily believe in the equal distribution of moral agency. A moral libertarian's free market would therefore require that people have equal opportunity, for the market to be truly free. In my opinion (again, not necessarily the collective view of all moral libertarians), this equal opportunity may be provided by a

combination of public education, welfare for the unemployed, and anti-trust and competition regulations to ensure that new players can enter the market. As for the classic Austrian School argument that this would be too much government intervention in the economy, for the free market economy to exist and function continuously, there already needs to be a substantial amount of government intervention anyway. For example, the government needs to issue and maintain a stable currency, there needs to be a reserve bank, there needs to be laws against fraud, there needs to be a police force to keep people's private property safe from thieves, and there needs to be a military to keep the nation secure from being taken over by external forces. Extreme libertarian 'solutions' like private currencies, private police forces and private militaries remain a pipe dream, and in any case could never provide the investor confidence needed for the free market to function properly. Given that the government already needs to be a substantial size just for the market to function, increasing it by a relatively small amount (public education and unemployment benefits are cheaper than the military) to make it even more of a free market (in the moral libertarian view) can be well justified. As long as the government doesn't start setting prices, restricting international trade or nationalizing our banks and industries, it is still a free market.

Ensuring free market economies also provide equal opportunities is not just a moral libertarian imperative. It is also a very practical imperative, for those of us who want free markets to survive. It is very easy for people like Hayek

to say that they do not care about equal opportunity and social justice. But for those who are actually prevented from participating meaningfully in the free market economy from birth, it is very difficult for them to believe in the free market system. It is these people who anti-market 'revolutionaries' find their audience and supporters in. Therefore, a free market with equal opportunities is also a strong and sustainable free market, and a market that doesn't care about equal opportunity essentially doesn't care about its own survival.

## It Takes Bravery and Commitment to be a Moral Libertarian

Moral libertarianism sounds simple. And it really is. After all, it's simply about making sure that everyone has equal moral agency. And the only practical and logical way to do that is by allowing everyone maximum liberty to live according to their moral compass, and not allowing anyone the 'liberty' to prevent others from living according to their moral compass. A really simple concept that can be easily applied to almost all social issues out there (economic issues are often a bit more complicated).

Unfortunately, it isn't always easy to uphold moral libertarian principles. The classic case concerned opposition to unjust wars. For most of human history, when leaders of a country have declared war on another country, for any citizen to dissent was almost akin to treason. No amount of religious moral conviction was enough justification for allowing dissenters to speak up. Fortunately, this all changed somewhere around the 1960s, triggered by the Vietnam War. On a more everyday life level, social pressures still exist in many circles, limiting the political stances one can publicly take without social penalty. For example, after 15 years of fighting for marriage equality, I still find it difficult to raise the subject with many friends and family members.

The left in the West, ideological descendants of the enlightenment, has traditionally been a reliable champion of free speech, and the Free Speech Movement of the 1960s was instrumental in finally allowing dissent in a wide range of areas, most importantly regarding whether a war is just. However, in recent years, parts of the Western left have walked away from free speech, instead preferring an approach where people's feelings come first, the so-called safe speech. This climate has made staying true to moral libertarian principles very difficult indeed in some leftist circles. Throughout history, conservatives have sometimes made dissent a crime against loyalty, religion or traditional values. But making unpopular opinion a crime against individuals' feelings is indeed a new concept the moral libertarian has to defeat.

A moral libertarian must speak up according to their true beliefs, and must resist peer pressure to shut up. But since the moral libertarian wants everyone to be equally able to speak up freely, we must also aim higher. It is unrealistic to expect everyone to be willing and able to resist peer pressure in the way we do, taking social penalties left, right and center as a result. Therefore, we need to strive to change the culture itself. We need to bring about a culture where it is everyone's right to speak as they sincerely believe. We also need to promote the idea that people should not take offense in the face of disagreement.

Of course, just to bring about such cultural change would put us into conflict with much of both the right and the left. I have to say that it is not a particularly friendly climate out there for us right now, for parts of the right still believe in controlling language to preserve traditions (hence, for example, their opposition to marriage equality), and the left is increasingly walking away from liberty and rationality towards group-identity and feelings. But if we believe in the ideal of equal moral agency and a genuinely free market of ideas, there is no alternative but to face the opposition and make our case.

# Moral Libertarian Perspective: Why Identity Politics is Often Morally Questionable

Despite its controversial reputation, identity politics appears to be increasingly influential recently. Maybe the arrival of the new wave of feminism, or perhaps the increased awareness of racial disparities in society, is causing this identity 'awakening'. While I'm personally not a supporter of the identity politics way of looking at things, even I have to agree that identity politics sometimes helps to advance the rights of minorities. However, we also cannot overlook the fact that identity politics as it currently exists is problematic. But how is it problematic? And can we save the best features of identity politics while rejecting the problematic elements?

From a moral libertarian perspective, initially there appears to be no problem with identity politics per se. If everyone had equal moral agency, surely some individuals can use their moral agency to advance the rights of the minority group they belong to? There is surely nothing wrong with this. However, things are really not that simple. Identity politics, in practice, often means seeing the world in an in-group vs out-group perspective. This perspective can lead some to only care about the rights and liberty of the in-group, and diminish the need of people outside the group for similar rights and liberty. This us-vs-them mentality doesn't

sit very well with a commitment to distribute liberty and moral agency equally among every human being.

In recent years, the rise of what I would call identity socialism has made identity politics even more problematic. Identity socialism is also often called cultural Marxism, but I will avoid that term here because it also refers to a right wing anti-Semitic theory about the Frankfurt School. Besides, identity socialism is really not similar to real Marxism in substance, even though it borrows a lot of Marxist language. Basically, identity socialism borrows the concepts of class consciousness and class struggle from old-school socialism, but applies these concepts to cultural and identity groups. Thus, women can be seen as an oppressed class, and so can LGBT people or ethnic minorities, and they should 'struggle' against the privileged classes (white, male, heterosexual, and so on). Like how some old-school socialists advocated taking away the rights and liberties of the bourgeois class at least temporarily so that the working class could be liberated, many identity socialists have no problems with reverse discrimination, as it's just all part of the 'class struggle' and 'liberation'. Identity socialists also demand that good allies in the privileged classes should 'check their privilege', which often includes accepting unfair treatment without complaint. If these supposedly privileged people dare voice concerns about being treated unfairly or vote at elections in a way that they think will end the unfair treatment, they can be labelled right-wing and reactionary. In fact, what I just said could make me a counter-revolutionary enemy in the eyes of identity socialists. An us-vs-them, all out culture war thus

begins. (Meanwhile, I understand that actual socialists and Marxists are also upset at this situation, because for them class solidarity is the most important thing, and the division of the working class into identity sub-groups is to be strongly discouraged.)

Anyone who is not stupid can see that there can be no compatibility between the identity socialists' version of identity politics, and the moral libertarian principle of equal moral agency. Moral libertarians believe that every individual in society should have equal moral agency (and hence liberty and political rights), regardless of their identity or cultural characteristics. A woman must not have less moral agency than a man, but then a man also must not have less moral agency than a woman. Therefore, a woman must not have less liberty or political rights than a man, but a man must also not have less liberty or political rights than a woman.

However, all this does not mean that moral libertarians cannot have some kind of politics informed by the lived experience of minorities. Unlike Marxists, who stress class solidarity above individual experience, or fascists, who stress national unity above individual experience, we liberals are individualists, i.e. we care most about the individual. Individual liberty, individual needs and individual lived experience serve as the ultimate guide for a truly liberal politics. Liberalism encourages each individual to make the most of their potential, and live their lives according to their own moral compasses. Therefore, it also encourages

individuals to identify systematic barriers that prevent them from doing this. It is under the umbrella of liberalism that women, ethnic minorities and LGBT individuals first found the justification that they too deserved equal liberty and equal opportunity, and found the language to express it. While conservatives, socialists and nationalists alike dismissed their concerns as selfish demands that should give way to collectivist objectives, our liberal forerunners listened carefully and helped introduce reforms to make society more liberal for everyone. And in this best tradition, we should continue to listen to what minorities have to say. As moral libertarians, we should not rest until there is equal liberty, equal opportunity, and hence equal moral agency between every individual in society, no matter what minority characteristics they may have.

In fact, the liberal version of identity politics, which is all about letting minority voices and lived experience inform us of how to build a more liberal society for all, is much more effective in being truly inclusive than the us-vs-them, culture-as-class struggle version of identity politics. First of all, when we start to think of people collectively as groups rather than as individuals, a group dynamic builds up, where individuals in the group are expected to have primary loyalty to the group. This loyalty often effectively includes following the political agenda of the group leaders. Thus pro-life feminists often find it difficult to have a place in predominantly pro-choice feminist movements. Similarly, politically conservative or even centrist LGBT individuals often find themselves unwelcome in some activist groups led by socialist leaders.

Thus such movements end up not serving all women or all LGBT people, they only serve those who politically conform to the activist establishment's wishes. First and second wave feminism often prioritized the needs and experiences of white women, and dismissed the voices of black, Latina and Asian women. Hence the introduction of intersectional feminism. But as much of feminism still has gatekeepers, the agenda of this so-called intersectional feminism is still limited by the agenda of the gatekeepers, making it effectively a Gatekeeper Limited Intersectional Feminism (GLIF). In the liberal version of identity politics, none of this would occur because everyone is welcome to add their voice to the free market of ideas; there simply is no group and therefore no leaders or gatekeepers. Secondly, group-based identity politics not only creates unequal moral agency between groups, it also creates unequal moral agency within groups. Those who do not conform to the activist establishment's agenda effectively have less moral agency, because they are often discouraged from speaking up or even semi-coerced into changing their views. Their disfavoured position within the movement also means that they may be excluded from activities of decision making. Thus they experience injustice within the movement itself, which further compounds the injustice they receive from the wider world as a result of their female or minority status. Unlike the group-based approach to identity politics, the liberal approach stresses equal liberty and equal opportunity for each individual, thus by design it will never make people excluded in this way.

## The Moral Libertarian Way to Social Justice

In an encouraging development, there has been an increased focus on social justice, both economically and socially, in recent years. As a liberal, I see this focus on providing equal opportunity for all as a good thing. However, I do have strong reservations about the approach of some activists, and these reservations have intensified in recent years. As a moral libertarian who believes in the equality of moral agency as the most important morality imperative in politics, things like so-called safe speech, no-platforming, political correctness, progressive stack speaking systems, and the exclusion from movements of people who express opinions the activist establishment label as 'regressive', are clearly not things I can accept. All these represent the activist establishment making cultural and moral decisions that other people are pressured to accept in one way or another, and in many cases also represent a top-down distortion in the free market of ideas.

In fact, I believe that sticking to the principle of equal moral agency is the route towards true social justice for all. After all, social justice is essentially another way of saying equal opportunity for all. Equal moral agency and equal opportunity are essentially the same thing. On the other hand, whenever the principle of equal moral agency is violated, there is not a situation of equal opportunity by definition.

From a moral libertarian perspective, things like no-platforming and the progressive stack are actually against social justice by definition, because they clearly violate the equality of moral agency. This is because, if some people can speak their minds but some cannot, or some people are given a higher priority to speak than others, there is clearly no equality of moral agency. But let's approach this from a more facts-based approach. To improve social justice, we need to know the injustices that are actually happening, and to obtain this knowledge we need to let people speak up about their lived experiences and their grievances. Not allowing some people to speak or placing them last in the queue effectively prevents them from getting the social justice they need. Back in the 1960s, college students started a Free Speech Movement, so they could voice injustices in relations to the Vietnam War and conscription, civil rights and women's rights. In time, these voices changed society forever. If conservatives were able to no-platform these activists, none of that progress would have happened. The New Left back then understood the importance of free speech. It is very regrettable that the current generation of leftists do not share this attitude.

Some leftists believe that they can subjectively classify certain ideas and attitudes as regressive, and censor them out, while not affecting social justice. In reality, this is not only misguided, this is moral hubris. From a moral libertarian theory perspective, this represents the activist establishment

making cultural and moral decisions for everyone else, deciding what they can say or think. Therefore, the principle of equal moral agency is clearly violated. But this is not just an issue in theory. In recent years, I have increasingly heard from women, ethnic minorities and LGBT individuals that have been excluded from so-called progressive movements because of certain beliefs they held or certain things they said. The activist establishment's decision to no-platform ideas they see as regressive actually has the effect of turning away some of the very people they are supposed to help. If we look at it from an intersectional perspective, it gets worse. For example, ethnic minorities, whether black, Latino, Asian or indigenous, are more likely to be religious and hold traditional viewpoints, and this also applies to female and LGBT members of ethnic minorities. Furthermore, the radical solutions proposed by the activist establishment often provoke intense backlash in ethnic communities and the developing world, causing ethnic minority women and LGBT individuals to favour more moderate solutions. It is therefore unsurprising that those complaining of exclusion are very often ethnic minorities, the very people intersectional feminism is supposed to help. In fact, if intersectional feminism is practiced this way, it is not real intersectional feminism, but GLIF (gatekeeper limited intersectional feminism).

The liberal alternative is to let the free market of ideas select the best solutions for social justice, and also improve ideas concerning social justice over time. In a truly free market of ideas, solutions that fulfil the previously unmet needs of

individuals will survive and thrive. Such solutions are progressive by definition, whether the activist establishment like them or not, because they fulfil a previously unmet need. A good example is same-sex marriage, a solution to a previously unmet need (the commitment and legal protection of same-sex couples) which was subjectively seen by the then-LGBT activist establishment as regressive (because they saw it as assimilation). As same-sex marriage was a progressive idea by definition (since it fulfilled a previously unmet need), it gradually won over more and more support in the free market of ideas, despite the bitter opposition of some establishment activists. On the other hand, ideas that do not offer anything better than what has already been previously offered are, by definition, regressive, just like if a company decided to sell a computer based on 20-year-old hardware and software. In a truly free market of ideas, we do not need to fear such regressive ideas, for they will eventually be eliminated by the market due to a lack of 'buyers'.

The free market of ideas also allows the development of the best solutions that will provide justice for the largest number of people over time. This is because, as differing and sometimes contradictory ideas enter the 'market' and compete against each other, proponents of ideas will have to be receptive to criticism and suggestions from other parties and improve their ideas over time so that they remain competitive. This effectively encourages repeated cycles of thesis-antithesis-synthesis, evolving and refining our ideas over time. Another great feature of the free market of ideas

is that it allows minorities within minorities a better opportunity to ensure that any solution for justice also serves them well. Where a minority is seen as a homogenous group and its voice is whitewashed by the activist establishment to sound uniform, the needs of minorities within minorities are usually not well heard or considered. But where there is a genuine free market of ideas, where ideas can flow freely without gatekeepers being able to erect barriers, minorities within minorities can make their case just like everyone else, and the activist establishment will either be forced to change to accommodate their needs, or face being discredited in the free market of ideas.

The free market of ideas, being made up of many minds, each understanding their own part of the human experience, can effectively process a vast amount of information about the injustices that are occurring out there, and select the best solutions that can improve a wide variety of injustices at the same time. On the other hand, movements controlled by elite activist establishments often focus only on what people in the establishment can see, resulting in solutions that do not serve the people they are supposed to serve. Using an economic analogy, the free market of ideas is like a free market of goods and services, where complicated information about demand, supply and costs is efficiently synthesized into appropriate prices that do not cause a surplus or shortage of goods. On the other hand, the elite activist establishment is sort of like the centrally planned command economies that used to exist, where the plans

seldomly met the actual needs of the people, resulting in either a surplus or a shortage of goods.

## Moral Libertarian Perspective: The Thin vs Thick Libertarianism Debate

In recent years, libertarianism has become increasingly divided between thin libertarianism and thick libertarianism. Thin libertarianism only focuses on greatly reducing the size of government, upholding property rights, and upholding the non-aggression principle (NAP), and is generally agnostic on all other issues. Thin libertarianism does not care about what attitudes people out there hold about social issues, and does not care about whether social liberties actually increase or rather become more restricted as a result of libertarian policies. Thick libertarians believe in the same governmental policies as thin libertarians, but they also insist on culturally encouraging everyone to adopt a live and let live attitude, and to rid society of traditional prejudices like racism, sexism and homophobia, so that individuals in society can truly experience an increase in liberty.

While moral libertarianism is not the same as political libertarianism, and indeed moral libertarians do not have to be, and are indeed sometimes not, political libertarians, moral libertarianism shares some of the core ideology and historical cannon of thought with political libertarianism. Therefore, moral libertarians can certainly be inspired by debates in political libertarianism, and vice versa. Looking at the matter from a basic perspective, it would appear that moral libertarianism shares some of the attitudes and goals

of thick libertarianism. In particular, unlike thin libertarianism, both thick libertarianism and moral libertarianism share a concern about increasing individuals' liberty in practice. I believe that there is a lot in thick libertarian thinking that can inspire moral libertarians in this area, and vice versa. In fact, on social (non-economic) issues, moral libertarianism and thick libertarianism often take similar views.

Thin libertarians often accuse thick libertarians of taking the same stance as the increasingly authoritarian 'new left' on social issues. It is not uncommon to hear from conservative-minded thin libertarians accusing thick libertarians of having cultural Marxist sympathies. I believe that the moral libertarian principles, particularly the equality of moral agency (EMA), can help illustrate why the aforementioned observation is wrong. I have written extensively on how moral libertarianism almost never actually takes the same stance as 'new left' socialism on social issues. In fact, when explaining and promoting moral libertarian positions, I have encountered plenty of hostility from the left, thus proving how different our views really are. Moral libertarians support everyone in society having equal moral agency, i.e. to live as per their own moral compass, and oppose any kind of moral coercion. Therefore, by definition we have to oppose traditional prejudice taking away the fair share of liberty and equal opportunity due to women, racial minorities and LGBT individuals. However, an important thing is that we also hold the same attitude towards religious conservatives, for example, again because by definition we have to. We believe

that the religious conservative should be able to hold, promote and live according to their views concerning marriage without prejudice from the rest of society under any circumstances, for example, and this right should have no expiry date. I don't think many 'authoritarian leftists' would hold the same view.

Thin libertarians also sometimes accuse thick libertarians of promoting social views that will inevitably lead to bigger government. For example, they sometimes say that thick libertarians promote libertine attitudes that cause family breakdown and increase drug and alcohol use, which will end up causing more welfare dollars to be spent, and therefore also more taxation. This kind of attitude is actually inconsistent with the general tradition of liberalism and libertarianism, in that we should not support restricting liberty just to pre-emptively prevent social consequences we may not like. Otherwise, it would be not be liberalism, but conservatism, socialism or something similarly authoritarian. Also, there is nothing under thick libertarianism that does not allow one to promote family values and clean living. Moral libertarianism goes even further: it insists that conservatives should have just as much right to promote their views as everyone else, without any social penalty.

In fact, a lot of conservative thin libertarians' accusations towards thick libertarianism betray their lack of faith towards liberty, towards what choices people would make if given full moral agency over their lives. There are even so-called

libertarians who savour the prospect of a future where the complete division of the world into privately-owned gated communities (most if not all owned by conservatives, according to their logic) will mean that most people will live according to conservative rules, not because they want to, but because they are forced to by the property owners. How is this different from authoritarian conservatism? Both political libertarians and moral libertarians can support conservative positions, but they must still respect other individuals' equal liberty and moral agency in the process. Just like everyone else, conservative libertarians can make their case in the free market of ideas, and try to persuade more individuals to live the way they want. Nothing more, nothing less.

## Moral Libertarian Perspective: Political Leadership is Overrated

In these times of uncertainty and crisis, there have been repeated calls for political leadership from many quarters of society. It is as though if our politicians would make some top-down decisions for us, everything will be alright again. Of course, those calling for political leadership from different parts of the political spectrum expect really different kinds of decisions to be made, so in reality, no political leader can hope to answer all these wishes for leadership satisfactorily. In fact, a leader that can unite the country and make strong decisions that most people can accept has always been an unlikely thing. Former US President Ronald Reagan was arguably the most popular Western leader in recent decades, but plenty of people strongly disliked him and his policies. Furthermore, the dream of unity behind a 'strong leader' is becoming increasingly impossible with the increasing fragmentation and polarization of our political landscape. But, a more fundamental question is, is this the right dream to have, in the first place?

At this point, I should perhaps declare my position upfront. As a moral libertarian who believes in all individuals having an equal amount of moral agency, I simply do not believe in governments and political leaders making top-down decisions for all. Therefore, of course I don't believe in all society uniting behind a strong leader. I do not believe in

political leadership for most issues, simply. But since people with ideological beliefs must still try to make their case in the free market of ideas using facts and ideology-neutral logic, in the rest of this article I will focus on just that.

Those calling for political leadership usually do so for two reasons: 1) either they want something fixed but don't know exactly how to, or 2) they want certain things fixed a certain way, but believe that only a government can do it. In fact, political leadership may seem the most immediate solution for both scenarios, but it certainly isn't the best solution for either.

If you want something fixed and your first thought is to call on the government to provide a solution, it effectively means that you trust the 'wisdom' of politicians more than your own wisdom, your family and friends' wisdom, and your neighbours' wisdom. However, history has shown this to be an often incorrect call. In fact, since all human beings are imperfect, the politicians are bound to get some things wrong, and even if just by chance, you, your family and friends, and your neighbours are bound to get at least some of these same things right. Therefore, placing your trust in politicians is effectively letting other people make decisions for you, even though you could have done better yourself. Furthermore, politics is too often a game of power struggle, alliances and deceit, and politicians may make decisions that are not truly guided by their conscience. Placing your blind trust in politicians is something only fools do. Instead, the

free market of ideas, being made up of the collective wisdom of many minds competing against each other, will always provide a much better solution.

More commonly, people call for political leadership because they think they need the power of government to change things. In many cases, however, this lack of ability for change outside government is because governments have appropriated certain powers for themselves at some point in history, power that they should not have had in the first place. In many cases, community-driven change, inspired by solutions selected from the free market of ideas, would have provided both a more effective solution, and a smoother and quicker path to change, if not for the government being a roadblock. For example, governments decided that they should have monopoly control over marriage around the 18th century or so. Fast forward to more recent times, and any change to marriage laws, whether it be the introduction of no-fault divorce, or the inclusion of same-sex couples, have become something that needs government approval. Hence these issues also needlessly became political issues, and often political footballs used by politicians for various purposes. If the government had never appropriated marriage for itself, the community could have resolved these issues simply by vigorous debate in the free market of ideas. Therefore, next time you come across an issue that looks like it can only be solved by the government, you should think about if it is really that the government should give up some of its control over society and individuals.

Another area where government intervention is often called for is education. Specifically, what should be taught in our public schools forms a large part of the ongoing culture wars. Just in the West in the past ten years or so, there have been calls for and against things like environmentalism and climate change, indigenous history, colonial history, feminist and LGBT history, LGBT acceptance, competing versions of citizenship education, and competing theories of Darwinian evolution and intelligent design to be taught in public schools. In fact, so that governments and public schooling could be as value-neutral as possible, it should always be wrong to use public school teaching to advance any ideological agenda. Public schools should stick to teaching uncontroversial things, uncontroversial meaning almost universally accepted by consensus in the particular field of study. For example, Darwinian evolution is uncontroversial within the context of Biology, but some parts of feminist history remain controversial in the wider field of history. Proponents of views and theories still considered controversial should refrain from trying to make it into school curricula; they are instead welcome to spread their ideas in other ways. Under this doctrine, there should be much less need for 'political leadership' in what schools teach.

In conclusion, I strongly believe that asking for more political leadership is misguided. Instead, we should reflect on what further areas the government could give up its control, and let individuals and society have more freedom.



## Moral Libertarianism is a Cultural Movement

Moral libertarianism looks like just another political ideology on the surface. It is a certain way of justifying a political attitude, liberalism, after all. A lot of what I have written about moral libertarianism references political history and political philosophy. However, I would actually consider moral libertarianism even more of a cultural movement. That is, the cultural aspects of moral libertarianism are perhaps even more important, and even more profound, than the political aspects. Let me explain.

Moral libertarianism is all about the equal distribution of liberty, and hence moral agency. Politics really needs to be changed for this to occur. However, politics alone cannot bring about this equality. If liberty and hence moral agency is to be equally distributed among each individual, without anyone having power over another, society will have to undergo an overall cultural change.

Let's start with free speech. Free speech is an inherent requirement of moral libertarianism, because if one is to have full moral agency over themselves, one needs to be able to at least voice their moral ideas without restriction. Free speech has theoretically existed in most of the West for quite a long time now. But I have to stress, it is only free speech in

theory. Otherwise, there wouldn't have been a need for the Free Speech Movement, as recently as the 1960s. In the recent Australian Marriage Law Postal Survey, the No camp felt that it was less socially acceptable to voice their opinions. But my feeling was that the Yes camp actually felt more of this pressure, especially in areas where No won, even if only by a moderate margin. Either way, it shows that neither camp fully believed that they could say what they believed, wherever they were, without any social consequences. In fact, free speech does not really fully exist, where people can be easily offended by the difference of opinion. Instead, people need to be able to think rationally and resolve differences of opinion peacefully and rationally. Changing this culture of easy offense should be a big part of moral libertarians' work going forward.

Another reason why free speech could be effectively restricted is because expressing unorthodox opinion can bring discrimination on oneself in many parts of society. The sociological term for this phenomenon is the Overton Window. Ideas within the Overton Window can be socially acceptably expressed, those outside the window cannot. Over time, the Overton Window can shift, for example acceptance of homosexuality was outside the window a century ago, but is now firmly inside it. Since expressing ideas outside the Overton Window can come with a personal cost, most people refrain from doing so. Therefore, the existence of the Overton Window phenomenon means that there is not complete free speech. Again, moral libertarians should seek

to change this, perhaps by expanding the Overton Window rapidly until there is no longer anything outside it.

Furthermore, the political aims of moral libertarianism can only be achieved with concurrent cultural change, including most importantly the way we think about government. While a few liberals and libertarians throughout history have flirted with the idea of having a non-democratic but very liberal governance, hypothesizing that where governments do not have to bend to democracy they can be more liberal, history has actually shown that democratically elected governments are the only species of liberal government. This is not surprising, as non-democratic governments need to maintain their rule against popular pressure, and suppressing dissent is almost always required for that. Furthermore, under moral libertarianism and the principle of equal moral agency, unavoidably collective decisions should be decided as close to one person, one vote as possible, and only democracy is compatible with this. Therefore, liberals have to support democracy, and work towards governance that is both liberal and democratic. Since in democracies, things are decided by majority mandate, if we want a liberal governance under a democratic system, we need to try our best to persuade our fellow citizens to take up liberal attitudes of thinking. If we are not successful in this, we will not succeed in any of our political aims. With the rise of the idea of 'illiberal democracy' in some parts of the world, as well as the increasingly collectivist attitude of some parts of the Western left in recent years, promoting liberal ideas about the role of

government is of particular urgency in every Western democracy.

One important way moral libertarians can promote liberal ideas about governance is to promote methods of change that do not require government intervention. For example, if we want to raise awareness about certain issues, don't ask for the government to include it in the public school curriculum. Instead, use blogs, social media and word-of-mouth. Of course, where those with opposing ideas want to use governments and public schools to advance their agenda, we should consider that cheating, and protest strongly.

# Moral Libertarian Perspective: The Question of Private Property

*NOTE: This article represents ONE moral libertarian's thinking on the issue of private property. It does not represent all moral libertarians' thinking on this matter. In fact, I accept that moral libertarians can be as pro-property as Rothbard or as anti-property as Marx, as long as their case rests on liberty, because moral libertarians must accept the equal moral agency of each other.*

Is private property good for liberty? Modern political libertarianism's answer on this issue is clear. For most contemporary political libertarians, whose thinking have been most strongly influenced by the views of thinkers like Hayek, Rothbard and Nozick, liberty means absolute private property rights, and where private property rights are even just a bit compromised, there is no true liberty. On the other hand, socialists and social liberals (left-liberals) claim that it would mean those who have no means of acquiring private property, most often due to being born into poverty in the first place, are effectively left without even basic liberties. In fact, their line of argument is also backed by historical thinkers, from Rousseau to Marx, who believed that private property should be abolished for the sake of liberation. A third approach is that of John Locke, often considered the father of classical liberalism. While Locke strongly supported private property rights, he thought that there also needs to

be enough and as good left over for others to use. This is clearly quite different from some modern libertarians, whose ultimate visions involve every part of the world being held as private property without exception.

Let's start from the modern political libertarian view, because that seems to be the default position in the discussion about property and liberty. Modern libertarianism is based on the non-aggression principle (NAP), which holds that no individual can commit aggression against another under any circumstances, unless they have broken the law through aggression against another in the first place. It logically follows that the government cannot take away any individual's private property under any circumstances, because, even if an individual refuses to pay taxes, they haven't committed aggression against any third party, and therefore the government dragging them to jail at gunpoint for refusing to pay taxes violates the NAP. However, this view of property rights is ultimately impractical, because no matter how small the government is made, some amount of taxes still have to be paid, and where the government jails individuals for not paying taxes it would still violate the NAP, meaning one could argue that the NAP-based property rights logic ultimately leads to anarchism. Furthermore, other people may argue that this logic depends on a particular definition of 'aggression'. For example, taking another view, merely trespassing into private property is not an act of aggression, therefore neither the government nor property owners should be able to use violence to prevent trespassing. Allowing law enforcement against trespassing

but not allowing law enforcement against tax evasion thus would be a double standard. This logic essentially leads to no effective property rights for anybody! It is therefore not surprising that the vast majority of people do not see the NAP as a practical basis to resolve the issue of property rights.

(Several libertarian thinkers have proposed that property owners instead be able to hire private police services and private militaries to protect their property. But firstly, such services would be very expensive, and out of the reach of the average property owner. Secondly, the authority of a private police service would not be recognised by another, resulting in such services acting like rival gangs where there are disputes. Investing in the wrong police service would therefore result in loss of property. Police services with proven track records will also therefore be able to raise prices to sky-high levels. Therefore, in the real world, there is no alternative to government regulation to maintain property rights. Leftist anarchists are at least right about one thing: no government, no private property, and no free market capitalism either.)

But let's imagine a society where the NAP approach to property rights has taken hold. Every bit of the world is now privately owned. People are born into vast privately-owned lands, sort of like the nation states that used to exist a few centuries ago. Since every bit of this land is owned by the CEO, he makes all the decisions, and the people who live

there have to obey his orders, or else face eviction, probably into some wasteland near the North Pole that nobody wants to own. Those who disagree with the CEO and can afford to rent property in another CEO's land can move, but those who cannot afford to move must just obey. In fact, at one point in history, people lived in similar circumstances: it was called the middle ages. In this kind of world, there is very little liberty for the vast majority of people. If this is your ideal world, then you might actually fit right into the Neo-reactionary crowd. But for us moral libertarians, there is clearly nothing like the equality of moral agency we so insist on here. In fact, it demonstrates why John Locke, though a strong supporter of property rights, believed that there must be enough and just as good left over for everyone else.

Now, let's think about another solution: what if there was no private property? This could theoretically be achieved overnight by the government simply refusing to enforce property rights. If, at the stroke of the clock at midnight the government stopped enforcing property rights, what do you think would happen? Chaos would probably take over by five minutes past midnight, with thugs breaking into properties and taking what they want everywhere across the country. After all, it's legal now. Of course, in this kind of society, there wouldn't even be basic safety and security for most people, let alone liberty and equal opportunity. In fact, there are several places around the world right now which are experiencing a total breakdown of law and order, so one does not even need to imagine how such a society would

look like. I don't know anyone who would like to live in one of those places.

Thus, when the far-left proposes there be no private property, they don't generally mean the abolishment of all regulation of property rights. Rather, they seek to collectivize the ownership of property as much as possible, using their own words. But what does this collective ownership look like? How can I collectively own a house, for example, with the four million other people who live in the same city? Who gets to decide what can be done about the house? Or even who can live there? Of course, to answer all this would require heavy-handed regulation from the government. In fact, in practice, collective ownership has always meant government ownership, because no other form of collective ownership is practically possible. Where the government owns all the property, they effectively have all the liberty and moral agency, because they get to make all the decisions: not unlike the kings and nobles of centuries past! Modern western democratic socialists often insist that, where the government is democratic, the decisions are effectively made by the people. But anyone with any experience in politics can tell you that politics is a game of powerplay, where alliances, strategies and deceit is the order of the day, meaning that 'representative' democracy is not always truly representative. Short of having a referendum on every decision to be made, there is no way to ensure that every decision truly reflects the will of the people. Therefore, a lot of the moral agency of making political decisions still rest on the hands of the politicians themselves. Giving government

too much power effectively means that politicians have a lot more moral agency than private citizens, something that is unacceptable from a moral libertarian point of view.

But let's pretend that property can be effectively collectively owned, for example via a government that somehow always makes decisions according to the majority's wishes. In this way, all the collective decisions would be made by the collective moral agency of the people without the politicians having any extra influence, in line with moral libertarianism's demands. But moral libertarians should only support collectively making decisions that are unavoidably collective, because these issues metaphorically represent one single indivisible pie of which everyone owns an equal share, and the only way to make a decision about what to do with this pie that respects equal moral agency is by each person having an equal share of the decision. However, many issues are not unavoidably collective, and moral libertarianism demands that each person be able to make their own moral decisions and live accordingly. Extending the pie metaphor, everybody has their own pie, and should get to decide what to do with their own pie, and only their own pie. Here, collective ownership is incompatible with moral libertarianism, because if all pies are collectively owned, the majority also gets to decide what the minority can do with their own pies. Thus in any moral controversy, the majority, being the majority, have moral agency over everyone in a winner-takes-all fashion, and the minority have no moral agency at all. This kind of democracy would essentially be an

illiberal democracy. Thus, even where collective ownership is possible, it would result in illiberal democracy at best.

Having looked at all the possible solutions for property rights, we can come to three conclusions. Firstly, private ownership of property is a necessary condition for liberty and equal moral agency, because 1) if there is no protection of private property, as in anarchism, then the physically strongest will rule over everyone else; 2) if all property is collectivized (i.e. government owned) politicians will practically rule over everyone else; 3) even if we could collectivize property in truly democratic way the majority in any dispute will effectively be able to take away all liberty and moral agency of the minority. Secondly, property cannot be too unequally distributed, because that will mean the haves can rule over the have-nots, effectively replicating the feudal system. Thirdly, there is really no objective reason why a government that maintains a system to protect private property via laws and policing cannot also demand some taxation for the purposes of wealth redistribution, as without government regulation in the first place private property cannot practically exist! If governments already tax individuals to maintain their private property (courts, militaries and police forces are expensive to maintain), and in the practical world owners of private property have to rely on this system to enforce their property rights, why can't the system be designed to include some wealth redistribution to ensure a more equal distribution of private property, and thus ensure actual liberty for all?



## Moral Libertarian Perspective: Power, Oppression and Liberation

Political philosophers throughout history have pondered questions of power, oppression, and how to liberate people from oppression. In recent years, such topics have also entered mainstream consciousness in an unprecedented way. There's one thing everyone can agree on: wherever there is power, there is great potential for oppression. And as Foucault and many other philosophers have noted, power and power dynamics are to be found everywhere in life. Therefore, oppression is potentially everywhere. However, just how to liberate people from oppression is still one thing that we cannot find consensus on yet.

I believe the moral libertarian principle of equal moral agency should be central to any sincere attempt to liberate everyone from oppression. Under the principle of equal moral agency, nobody can have power over anybody, and hence there is no oppression. In other words, as long as we strive to achieve the principle of equal moral agency, we will be heading in the right direction to liberate everyone from oppression.

It is also therefore, the more we care about liberating everyone from oppression, the more we must oppose everything that runs contrary to the principle of equal moral agency. To this end, we must oppose all government policy

deciding top-down for everyone that certain citizens shall be second class and afforded less rights, for example laws against the religious freedom of certain religious groups, or laws against the equal rights of LGBT individuals. We must also oppose structures that allow some people to control what others can say (or even preventing them from speaking up in the first place), like so-called safe speech and the so-called progressive stack. For those who believe in true liberation from oppression, there should be no excuses for refusing to uphold the principle of equal moral agency.

Some conservatives may argue that certain 'traditional' policies are needed to uphold tradition, or to stop what they consider to be the left's 'long march through the institutions'. However, they clearly have too little faith in the free will and moral compass of the many individuals that exist in every society. Would they just sit there and allow a 'long march through the institutions' to occur? In fact, if somebody wanted to initiate such a 'long march', they would most likely start with the government, and then use government power to forcibly change every other institution. Weakening the ability of governments to define societies certainly prevents this approach.

On the other hand, some progressives argue that we need to give certain groups priority to speak up, and remove the ability of other groups to have a voice, to achieve equality. This view not only doesn't respect individuals as individuals rather than just members of groups, this view is also deeply

misguided from a power and liberation perspective. Because such arbitrary systems by definition require policing by certain individuals, they effectively help create a power differential, and hence great potential for oppression. Some may think that this temporary inequality will help end oppression, but this idea has never worked in history. Rather, it just changes the oppressors to people who happen to identify as 'progressives'.

In conclusion, sticking to the principle of equal moral agency is the only way we can head in the right direction to end all power dynamics and oppression. Anything else is simply 'some are more equal than others', and will inevitably create dynamics of power and oppression.

## The Moral Libertarian Case Against Victim Mentality

Traditionally, almost every culture had discouraged victim mentality, i.e. the worldview of oneself as a victim of external circumstances, and instead encouraged everyone to adopt a can-do attitude. The downside was that the protests of those on the receiving end of very real injustices were generally dismissed. Possibly as an overreaction to this history, nowadays some progressives are effectively encouraging women, ethnic minorities and LGBT individuals to adopt a victim mentality. Of course, this more than solves the traditional problem of dismissing protests against injustice. But going too far in the other direction may also have unintended consequences.

Don't get me wrong. We need to recognise the actual injustices that are happening out there, so we can remedy the situation. Encouraging minorities to speak up about the actual injustices they face in their lives can provide all of us with much needed insight. However, when one's identity and worldview is almost defined by being a victim of forces beyond one's control, that is what I would call having a victim mentality. With the recent increasing popularity of identity-based 'socialism', where the concept of class consciousness is extended to cultural 'oppressions', and where everyone is competing to claim less privilege, victim mentality has never looked so cool. However, a victim mentality is not only

personally disabling and psychologically unhealthy, the widespread adoption of victim mentality can have severely adverse consequences for liberty. Since we are talking about moral libertarianism here, the rest of this article will only deal with society-wide consequences.

Having an all-encompassing victim mentality inevitably colours one's cultural and political worldview too. Feeling like a victim all the time naturally makes one desire, and even demand, protection from 'stronger' people. This creates a justification for those who think of themselves as the protectors of oppressed minorities, giving them licence to police the speech of other people. Any dissent can then be labelled as bullying or victimization. Hence, victim mentality and free speech are mutually incompatible. Furthermore, from a moral libertarian point of view, this is totally unacceptable, because it effectively means one is making moral decisions for others, even if it is justified on social justice and protection.

Those with a victim mentality worldview are also at risk of developing a mutually oppositional, us-vs-them worldview. When one thinks of certain groups in society as their oppressors, it is easy to think of them as enemies. Fears of giving the 'oppressors' any chance to 'oppress' also loom large. Thus, it becomes easy to see personal liberty and opportunity as a winner-takes-all 'competition' between forces of good and evil, where for the 'oppressed' to thrive, the 'oppressors' must have as little liberty as possible. Literal

equal opportunity becomes unacceptable because this would give the 'oppressors' opportunity to harm the 'oppressed'. It is therefore unsurprising that people who think this way often have no problems with reserve discrimination and even, in some cases, reverse oppression. Of course, this way of thinking is also incompatible with the moral libertarian goal of equal moral agency for all.

I am not saying that pursuing justice and standing up for minorities isn't important. But there are ways to do so without encouraging people to adopt a victim mentality. We can instead lead by example and tell the world that we stand against bigotry and discrimination, because we are not as cowardly as those who cannot face their own prejudices. We do not need 'safe speech', because we are confident of the rational righteousness of our position. We are confident that our position will win in the free market of ideas, and with reason bigotry and hate will be defeated once and for all.

In conclusion, the rise of a culture of victim mentality is not something liberals, and particular moral libertarians, can accept. Victim mentality is not only uncool, it is dangerous for the future of all humanity. There are better ways to bring about social justice.

## Moral Libertarians should Fight Political Correctness from both Left and Right

Many people say they hate political correctness. Of course, moral libertarians naturally hate political correctness too. The principle of equal moral agency requires that everyone be able to express and promote their moral views, which means that free speech is needed. Furthermore, we believe in the free market of ideas, which requires a lack of impediment to free speech to function properly.

Among people who say they hate political correctness, however, many fail to oppose all forms of political correctness, or worse, fail to even recognize all forms of political correctness. For example, in last year's Australian Marriage Law Postal Survey, the 'no' camp said that extending marriage rights to same-sex couples was political correctness. But was that really true? After all, same-sex couples already lived in committed relationships recognised by society, and often had legally unrecognised wedding ceremonies. Same-sex couples already lived in marriage-like relationships, and their relationships were generally regarded across Australian society as not different in nature from heterosexual marriages, as evidenced by the landslide victory of the 'yes' camp. Hence the idea of marriage being a relationship between two people regardless of gender was already de-facto correct, it just wasn't legally correct, i.e. politically correct. Amending the law would bring legal and

political correctness in line with the reality. Conversely, the idea that marriage could only be between a man and a woman had already become only politically correct, because it did not line up with lived reality in Australian society anymore. Hence, the 'no' camp was the politically correct camp, hoping to maintain a standard of political correctness that deviated from reality. As you can see, conservatives are not free from political correctness either, they are just blind to it: so blind that they often accuse the other camp of being politically correct instead.

In fact, the left is also responsible for some of the right's attitude that political correctness is whatever they don't like. A substantial part of the left have bought the idea that political correctness is who they are, so much that when former Democratic presidential candidate Bernie Sanders blamed Donald Trump's victory on political correctness, the comment were controversial within the left. In this case, the political correctness Sanders was referring to surrounded the lack of criticism of pro-corporate policy in mainstream media and politics, something both socialists and libertarians alike have been complaining about for quite a long time. Therefore, there was no reason why the left would disagree with him here. In fact, the left didn't disagree with Sanders at all, they were just not used to describing their opponents as politically correct. But Sanders was clearly correct here. Mainstream politics had presumed a 'correct' point of view and failed to represent other points of view, and this is political correctness by definition.

Having discussed two examples of right-wing political correctness, I believe I need to provide some balance here. Of course, the left is not without problems of political correctness either, to put it mildly. In recent years, the left has indeed taken leftist political correctness to new heights, with concepts like no-platforming and safe speech. Politically incorrect speech is now deemed unsafe, and must be no-platformed, i.e. completely disallowed. This attitude, formerly believed only to exist in fascist dictatorships, is invading progressive circles at a worrying pace. Reviving the free speech culture and upholding the free market of ideas has arguably become our most urgent imperative, as moral libertarians. As a former US president liked to say, freedom is never more than two generations from extinction.

In conclusion, political correctness comes from both the left and the right, and perhaps even other directions too. To oppose political correctness sincerely is to oppose all forms of political correctness consistently. We cannot allow being against political correctness to become just a brand politicians use to attack opponents, or a slogan the right use to attack the left.